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Chairman:	Mrs. ESPINOSA	(Mexico)
later:	Mr. TESSEMA (Vice-Chairman)	(Ethiopia)
later:	Mrs. ESPINOSA	(Mexico)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 106: PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN (continued) (A/51/41 (Supplement No. 41), A/51/90, 256, 306 and Add.1, 385, 424, 456 and 492)

1. Mr. KERR (Australia) said that the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been a significant factor in raising awareness of children's rights, but much remained to be done if the goals of the World Summit for Children were to be met. United Nations bodies and agencies such as the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had a crucial role to play in monitoring and assisting implementation of the Convention, and there was scope for action at the regional and international level, especially in tackling problems of a cross-border nature such as the sale of children, child sex tourism and child pornography. The World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children had been a welcome initiative, and his delegation urged Member States to give priority to the implementation of its Agenda for Action. He called for cooperation between Governments, intergovernmental agencies, non-governmental organizations and the private sector in combating sex tourism and computer-disseminated pornography. His Government was committed to strengthening legal protection for children in the area of sexual exploitation and welcomed progress on the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child addressing that issue.

2. The final report of the Secretary-General's expert on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306) provided a harrowing reminder of the unacceptable abuse and horrific injuries inflicted on children during armed conflicts. It was especially distressing to find that United Nations peacekeeping personnel had been involved in child prostitution. The proposal to establish "zones of peace" for children should be embraced by all nations. His Government supported a global ban on the production, stockpiling, use and transfer of anti-personnel landmines and had unilaterally suspended the operational use of such mines. It had also announced a $12 million package of mine-clearance assistance over a three-year period to Cambodia and Laos.

3. The decision of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to begin work on a convention dealing specifically with exploitative child labour was welcome. The underlying causes of the continuing problem of child labour had to be addressed, to ensure that children were given viable long-term alternatives to jobs. The provision of a good education and the development of poverty alleviation strategies were crucial; poverty could not be used as a pretext for the exploitation of children, a phenomenon which also occurred in developed economies.

4. To translate concern about the plight of children into meaningful action required political commitment and a critical examination of attitudes; the actions of the international community must be based on the genuine belief that children were deserving of care and protection in their own right.

5. Mr. PACHIU (Romania) said that his delegation subscribed to the views expressed by the representative of Ireland on behalf of the European Union. He noted that, despite some successes since the adoption of the Convention on the

Rights of the Child and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the signals from recent reports, including the report of the Secretary-General's expert on the impact of armed conflict on children, were alarming. His delegation strongly supported the action-focused initiatives undertaken by United Nations bodies and attached the utmost importance to the implementation of the recommendations contained in the relevant United Nations reports. There was a general awareness that legislation per se was not enough to prevent violations of children's rights, and that Governments needed to complement legislative measures with effective action.

6. His Government, in the throes of the difficult transition to a market economy, had adopted the necessary legislation and taken action to improve the situation of children, particularly those under especially difficult circumstances. The National Committee for the Protection of the Child, a specialized agency of his Government, had launched a national plan of action for children in 1995, with strong support from various international and national organizations. The plan provided a preventive and comprehensive approach to issues affecting children, including the sexual exploitation of children. It was designed to help street children and abandoned children in particular, and also paid attention to special educational and public health programmes with a view to strengthening the family unit.

7. Children in his country had benefited from the implementation of the relevant United Nations instruments, and his delegation strongly supported the elaboration of optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child related to the sale of children, child prostitution and pornography, and to the involvement of children in armed conflicts. Lastly, he expressed the wish that children everywhere should be allowed to grow and learn in conditions of peace and security.

8. Mr. KA (Senegal) began by asking whether it was not the duty of every human being to make the world a better place for future generations, and to begin by ensuring that all children had a good education. Unfortunately, adults were not facing up to that responsibility, with the result that crime, drug use, child prostitution and the use of children in armed conflicts were all on the increase. The moving report by the Secretary-General's expert on the impact of armed conflict (A/51/306) reminded everyone that when a child's sole means of survival was the gun rather than the book, the international community had failed in its responsibilities. The daily television images showing the suffering of children in eastern Zaire and the Great Lakes region made him wonder whether there was any compassion left in the world.

9. The international community had to switch its focus from reacting to crises to preventing them. His delegation therefore supported the expert's 10-point action plan, particularly the appointment by the Secretary-General of a special representative on children and armed conflict. He also believed that the use of children in armed conflict should be made a criminal offence, in order to deter adults from exploiting innocent children in that way. His delegation welcomed the outcome of the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and supported the idea of criminalizing all forms of exploitation of children.

10. Health and education, and therefore children, were among the first to suffer when economies were under pressure, which was why his Government had proposed, at the World Summit for Children, that the debt of the developing countries should be redeemed and used to help children. After the Summit, his Government had adopted a national plan of action, based on the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the Summit, targeting the areas of health, nutrition and education. The plan contained practical measures to provide children with protection and the chance to thrive in a secure environment.

11. Lastly, he wished to pay tribute to the humanitarian organizations, which were always there to alleviate human suffering when tragedy and despair struck.

12. Mr. MOREIRA GARCIA (Brazil) said that the rapid and almost universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was a hopeful sign that the world was prepared to act against the daily violations of children's basic rights. International cooperation, particularly through the relevant United Nations agencies, played a crucial role in complementing national action to improve the lot of children. The Committee on the Rights of the Child had done some outstanding work, but it would be more effective if there was greater cooperation with States parties. He therefore welcomed the plan of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to provide the Committee with all necessary resources.

13. His delegation attached great importance to the protection of children in especially difficult circumstances and believed that the recommendations in the report of the Secretary-General's expert on the situation of children in armed conflict should be implemented. An optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts should be drafted and adopted and other ways sought to alleviate the suffering of those children; his Government's recently announced moratorium on the export of landmines and its support for a convention to ban such weapons were steps in that direction.

14. He urged all countries to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. His Government subscribed fully to the Declaration and Agenda for Action adopted at the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, and had established a framework for follow-up meetings between the relevant Brazilian governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations. The close cooperation between his Government and non-governmental organizations had led to the adoption of innovative measures, as noted by the Executive Director of UNICEF on a recent visit. The initiatives included projects to eliminate child prostitution, the dissemination of information on the rights of the child, telephone numbers for denouncing violations, shelters for child victims of sexual exploitation, specialized police stations and educational campaigns in schools.

15. His Government's policy on child labour was to focus both on the suppression of illegal practices, by means of special mobile inspection units, and on attempts to eliminate the root causes of the problem, with the collaboration of the business sector and trade unions. Its "School Fellowship" programme provided financial aid to families who removed their children from the workplace and kept them at school. ILO was providing technical assistance with special educational programmes designed to help working children adapt to formal

education. Furthermore, great efforts were being made to improve basic education, with a focus on better training and salaries for teachers. The federal Government had proposed, and was likely to have approved, a fourfold increase in resources for basic education, to a level well above the level recommended by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

16. Brazil had already reached the majority of the end-of-decade goals established at the World Summit for children; he was convinced that the international community had a crucial role to play in ensuring that the rights of the child remained a priority in the field of human rights.

17. Mrs. TOLLE (Kenya) welcomed the timely and comprehensive report of the Secretary-General's expert on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306) and said that a concerted effort at all levels was needed to eliminate the flagrant violation of the rights of children throughout the world. Her delegation supported the conclusions and action-oriented recommendations in the report, including the recommendation that the Secretary-General should appoint a special representative on children and armed conflict, who would be responsible for assessing progress in the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report.

18. As the basic needs of children cut across ideologies, her delegation believed that all parties to a conflict should be encouraged to recognize children as a "zone of peace". Active measures, at the national and international levels, must be undertaken to ensure that children were untouchable and inviolate, even at the height of armed conflict; the concept of military security must be replaced by the concept of human security. Her delegation welcomed Security Council resolution 1078 (1996), which called for the speedy and peaceful resolution of the crisis in eastern Zaire, where children continued to be the innocent victims of violence.

19. Her Government was firmly committed to ensuring the full and effective implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the achievement of the goals of the World Summit for Children. She pointed out that her Government had also signed and ratified the African Charter on the Rights and the Welfare of the Child. Her delegation welcomed the growing political will to protect children and commended UNICEF for its promotion of the rights of the child in all parts of the world.

20. She then announced a series of measures that her Government had put in place to promote and protect the rights of children. First of all, it had established a task force to coordinate the relevant government agencies and ensure the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It was preparing a comprehensive bill to bring legislation into line with the provisions of the Convention; it was reviewing the relevant sections of laws dealing with the protection of children and had introduced stringent punishments for child offenders; and it had enacted legislation against child pornography. It was also involved in raising public awareness with the aim of eradicating harmful traditional practices and social attitudes that discriminated against the girl child, and was targeting various programmes at infants, pre-school children and pregnant women in both rural and urban areas. It was encouraging both the family and the community to play a central role in protecting the rights of children through educational, health and nutritional programmes, and

had introduced bursaries for girls from poor households in rural and slum areas to improve the quality of education for girls.

21. Mr. XU Hong (China) said that the ratification by 187 States of the Convention on the Rights of the Child reflected their common understanding that the survival, protection and development of children were prerequisites for a civilized society. Nevertheless, the rights of children continued to be violated because of wars, poverty and natural disasters. There was a clear need for more effective measures at both the national and international levels to create an environment conducive to children's happiness and well-being and to tackle the root causes of their problems. His delegation was therefore favourable to the elaboration of draft optional protocols to the Convention on the involvement of children in armed conflicts and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography respectively. However, he saw no need for the establishment of new mechanisms to monitor their implementation, since that would necessitate complex negotiations which might hinder the drafting of the two protocols. It would be more practical to make full use of the existing mechanisms.

22. There were over 300 million children in China and his Government strove constantly to create favourable social conditions for their development. Since the initiation of China's domestic reforms, programmes aimed specifically at children had become an increasingly significant component of the country's national development strategy. Substantial progress had already been achieved. For example, the reduction in the infant mortality rate and the improvements in child nutrition, health and education achieved in China were greater than those achieved by other developing countries. His Government valued international cooperation in the field of children's rights and had enjoyed successful partnerships with UNICEF, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The presentation of China's initial report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child had been an opportunity for frank and constructive discussion. His Government would continue its unremitting efforts to enure the well-being of the country's children.

23. Mr. VALENCIA RODRIGUEZ (Ecuador) said that his Government's national plan of action for the survival, protection, development and participation of children in the 1990s remained a national priority. A variety of governmental and non-governmental bodies were involved in implementing the goals set for the year 2000.

24. Ecuador was working to bring its legislation into line with the various international instruments that it had signed guaranteeing the rights of children. The Juvenile Code now reflected the letter and the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Ecuador had submitted its initial report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in May 1996. It had also proposed one of its experts for membership in that Committee.

25. His Government saw education as the most powerful tool for guaranteeing the ethical and intellectual development of children so that they could meet the world's challenges from a position of equality. He drew attention to the Nariño Commitment, adopted at the Ministerial Meeting on Children and Social Policy in

the Americas, which declared that priority must be given to children and young people in the hemisphere's social agenda for the remainder of the millennium.

26. Mr. JAYANAMA (Thailand) said that his delegation endorsed the report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitutes and child pornography (A/51/456), as well as the recommendations made in the report of the Secretary-General's expert on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306), especially for the appointment of a special representative of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict. together with the anti-war agenda of UNICEF, the expert's recommendations would give impetus to the efforts of Governments, United Nations bodies and civil society to protect children from the atrocities of war, a task that required not only political will but also human awareness.

27. Just as attention to children's issues had increased in the past decade, the scope of the problems - the sale of children for sexual purposes, the situation of children in armed conflict, child refugees, child labour and street children - had acquired new dimensions and degrees of complexity. Four integrated strategies - the survival and development of children and the protection and promotion of their rights - must be given top priority by the United Nations.

28. One of the most daunting problems was child sexual abuse and exploitation, a transnational phenomenon that extended from the remotest communities to multinational networks, involving highly organized international crime syndicates and local operators and affecting all socio-economic strata. The problem was exacerbated by international sex tourism, for which there was a global demand and a plentiful local supply and which could be combated only through close international cooperation. Countries must follow the example set by Sweden and Belgium by criminalizing the action of their nationals who engaged in the sexual exploitation of children in other countries. The media should also do more to expose the problem. His Government had adopted a national plan of action for the prevention and eradication of the commercial sexual exploitation of children and had strengthened existing laws, in particular, the penalties under the Criminal Code for paedophilia and child sex abuse, and enacted new legislation. It had developed systematic cooperation between the public and private sectors and committed itself to the Declaration and Agenda for Action of the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Stockholm in August 1996.

29. Thailand had tried to create alternatives to child labour through education and rural employment opportunities, and its efforts had begun to show results. Some developed countries had penalized developing countries for not taking proper steps to prevent child labour, but such a policy could harm the very children it sought to protect. Closing the door to child labour without providing viable alternatives could drive children to even more hazardous choices, such as the sex trade. The issue had to be approached judiciously.

30. Children were always the innocent victims, physically and psychologically, of acts committed by others. They were humankind's most precious resource and the world's future and their fate was in society's hands.

31. Mr. TESSEMA (Ethiopia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

32. Mr. SYLVESTER (Belize), speaking on behalf of the 13 member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that the Convention on the Rights of the Child was the framework within which all the CARICOM Governments' policies, plans and programmes for children were developed. Those Governments looked forward to universal ratification and, more importantly, full implementation of the Convention.

33. The comprehensive and judicious report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306) catalogued the horrendous atrocities still being committed against children in all parts of the world. Humankind's widespread betrayal of the sacred trust to protect and nurture childhood pointed to a fundamental crisis of civilization. Urgent, resolute action on the part of the international community was needed in order to provide speedy redress for the victims of such unconscionable brutality and exploitation. It was just such a sense of urgency that had brought more than 100 delegates to the Caribbean Conference on the Rights o the Child convened by UNICEF and CARICOM in Belize City in October 1996. Experiences had been shared and legal and social frameworks reviewed to ensure fuller implementation of the Convention. Children themselves had participated in the Conference, making specific recommendations on improving standards of health, education and social welfare.

34. Just as all the reports on the item before the Committee contained comprehensive but also very specific recommendations for intersectoral, multidisciplinary approaches to an agenda for international and national action, so too the Caribbean Conference had adopted the Belize Commitment to Action for the Rights of the Child, which reaffirmed the principle that children had first call on a nation's resources and formulated specific commitments to that end. The Caribbean Governments had received crucial assistance from the United Nations and agencies such as UNICEF, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in support of their national plans of action to foster observance of children's civil rights and improve the situation of children who were at personal and social risk.

35. The CARICOM Governments had been represented at the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and had joined in issuing the unequivocal message that such exploitation must end and that both of the underlying causes, such as poverty, family breakdown and growing materialism, and the involvement of criminal organizations and increasing use of computer technology to that end must be addressed. Economic and social factors were also to blame for the exploitation of child labour. Public awareness campaigns and education about children's rights were crucial to changing public attitudes and must also be directed to children themselves.

36. The expert of the Secretary-General had driven home the point that war violated every right of the child. The specific recommendations made in her report (A/51/306) should be widely publicized in popular format. The CARICOM countries supported the appointment of a special representative on children and armed conflict and also the suggestion that children should be treated as "zones of peace". They commended the outcome of the Fifth Regional Consultation on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Colombia in April 1996, and looked forward to the drafting of an inter-American declaration on the rights of the child.

37. The United Nations specialized agencies were providing valuable financial assistance and institutional support in the subregion towards meeting the very pressing immediate and long-term needs of the children of refugees and displaced persons. International cooperation in the psycho-social rehabilitation and reintegration of child victims of all forms of abuse was critical. There was no question that there was a linkage between the arms trade and the continued violation of children's rights. The illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons in the sub-region was causing mayhem among young people. The arms-supplying countries must cooperate in interdiction efforts or an entire generation would be lost.

38. Full application of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant human rights and humanitarian instruments must be an immediate priority. Moral outrage must be transformed into concrete action.

39. Mr. KAMAL (Pakistan) said that in many developing countries, the lives of children were endangered at or before birth by high rates of maternal and infant mortality, malnutrition and lack of adequate health care, education and opportunities. The girl child was particularly vulnerable to neglect, abuse and exploitation, and economic deprivation and widespread poverty forced parents to send their children to work instead of to school.

40. Children the world over had been subjected to gross abuse and exploitation by unscrupulous individuals and groups. They were the most vulnerable refugees during flight and in refugee camps, and in the recent past hundreds of thousands of them had been killed in civil wars and conflicts. The study by the Secretary-General's expert laid the foundations for future work on alleviating the suffering of children trapped in arms conflicts. Timely intervention by the United Nations to prevent and resolve conflicts could save innumerable children's lives.

41. As noted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in considering its initial report, Pakistan had taken steps to bring its national legislation into line with the Convention and was in the process of reviewing its national plan of action, increasing budgetary allocations to the social sector and education and combating violence against children. It had organized multimedia campaigns to highlight the rights of the child, especially the girl child. Crimes against children, such as murder, kidnapping, sexual abuse, torture or forced labour, had been made punishable by the maximum penalty, including capital punishment; legislation on child labour and abuse of children was being implemented and brought into conformity with ILO Conventions. Effective liaison was being established between governmental and non-governmental agencies, and a separate Ministry of Human Rights had been set up.

42. The Constitution of Pakistan outlawed slavery in any form, and its legislation prohibited the employment of children under the age of 14 or in hazardous work or bonded labour. An active inspection system was in place, but child labour in Pakistan existed mostly in the informal sector or in cottage industries. The latest statistics showed that there were 3.6 million working children in Pakistan - 0.75 per cent of the world's child-labour population. The Ministry of Social Welfare had established rehabilitation centres in areas with the greatest concentration of child labour. The centres provided free education, medical care, nutrition and vocational training for children.

Government committees had been set up in the areas of education, elimination of child labour and juvenile justice to review national laws and policies and make recommendations for the effective implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

43. Pakistan's economic situation had severe implications for the survival and development of children. Merely to achieve schooling for all, it would have to spend 18 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP). Promoting child survival and development required a range of interdependent political, policy and planning measures that cut across conventional sectors and formed part of a broader social action programme that included family planning, basic health care, primary education, rural water supply and sanitation. The promotion and protection of the rights of children should not be politicized or used to pursue protectionist economic goals. The international community should work together for the survival and development of children, particularly in developing countries.

44. Mrs. LOPES DA ROSA (Guinea-Bissau) said that every child, irrespective of nationality, ideology or culture, had the right to adequate nutrition, health care and education, to decent housing and to the love, warmth and security of a caring family. The Convention on the Rights of the Child represented a multidisciplinary approach to the protection of children, with those rights being perceived as interdependent. While the ratification of the Convention by an unprecedented number of countries was encouraging, States parties must respect its provisions in their entirety if it was to be truly effective.

45. Guinea-Bissau had been one of the first countries to ratify the Convention and, since its entry into force, her Government had spared no effort to enhance the well-being of the country's children. Her delegation wished to underline the importance of regional meetings in raising awareness of the Convention's provisions and strengthening cooperation at the regional level. Such meetings would also provide a valuable opportunity for members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to familiarize themselves with conditions in a given region. She commended the Committee for its constructive work, in particular its helpful recommendations to States parties.

46. There could be no justification for the use of child soldiers in armed conflicts. She hoped therefore that the comprehensive report of the Secretary-General's expert on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306) would spur the international community to take a more concerted and determined stand against that phenomenon. The plight of unaccompanied refugee minors was also of special concern to her Government. The reunification of those children with their families should be a priority. She welcomed the signing of a memorandum of understanding on that issue between UNHCR and UNICEF and commended their efforts, in partnership with Governments, non-governmental organizations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), to enhance the protection of unaccompanied refugee minors.

47. The sexual exploitation of children was an odious crime which required that harsh measures be taken against the perpetrators. Governments must work together to strengthen their legislation to that end. Her delegation supported the Declaration and Agenda for Action of the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (A/51/385), in particular the recommendation

that sex tourism should be treated as a criminal offence. There was a clear need for a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child related to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

48. Mrs. SYLLA (Guinea) said that her Government had set up an agency to elaborate, implement, monitor and assess the Government's policy on the promotion and protection of the rights of children. On the legislative front, the 1983 Civil Code and the 1995 Penal Code took into account international provisions relating to the rights of the child, as did the Labour Code and the Social Security Code. Pursuant to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the recommendations of the World Summit for Children, her Government had established municipal children's committees which played a mobilizing and advocacy role, set up a national committee to monitor, protect and defend the rights of children, drawn up a five-year national plan of action and promoted private sector involvement in pre-school education and in the protection of children in difficult circumstances.

49. Her Government's educational policy aimed to achieve basic education for all by the year 2000 and an 80 per cent primary school completion rate for both boys and girls, in an effort to reduce the gender gap. Its health policy included an expanded programme of immunization, primary health care, the availability of essential medicines and the integration of family planning into the activities of health centres. Maternal and infant mortality rates nevertheless remained a matter of concern. The projected cooperation programme with UNICEF for the period 1997-2000 should make it possible to achieve the goals of child protection, survival and development in Guinea.

50. The effective enjoyment of children's rights required social mobilization, advocacy and strengthening of the role of the family and the community. Gender inequality and stereotypes must be eliminated and emergency action must be taken in favour of children who were at particular risk. In that connection, Guinea supported the recommendations of the Secretary-General's expert on the impact of armed conflict on children.

51. Mr. PASHAYEV (Azerbaijan) said that the report of the Secretary-General's expert (A/51/306) represented a comprehensive study of the impact of armed conflict on children. However, in asserting that all the major conflicts currently raging in the world were internal, the report did not reflect the situation in Azerbaijan, 20 per cent of whose territory had been occupied by Armenian forces, compelling some 1 million men, women and children to flee their homes. The destruction of homes, schools, libraries, mosques and agricultural and industrial enterprises had torn apart the fabric of Azerbaijani society.

52. The international community must act effectively to protect the rights of children affected by armed conflicts. United Nations agencies, through their humanitarian assistance programmes, should play a leading role. More effective post-conflict measures must also be taken, including the speedy return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes and the promotion of reconciliation and economic recovery. His delegation supported the proposal to appoint a special representative on the impact of armed conflict on children, to continue the important work begun by the Secretary-General's expert. The creation of a mechanism to monitor the implementation of the recommendations

contained in the expert's report would greatly enhance the protection afforded to children in conflict situations.

53. While the ratification by 187 countries of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was encouraging, little would be achieved unless States parties fulfilled the obligations which they had undertaken. His delegation was convinced that in order to guarantee the well-being of children, States must have strong economies, efficient health and education systems, and good relations with their neighbours, thereby minimizing the dangers of armed conflict and its catastrophic consequences for children.

54. Mr. FORNER ROVIRA (Andorra) said that Andorra was gratified that the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been signed by 187 countries, demonstrating States' concern for the situation of children. His Government had ratified the Convention and had also stressed the importance of educating children in human rights and tolerance. At the World Summit for Social Development, Andorra had advocated inter-generational dialogue as the basic instrument for educating children properly and transmitting the experience of older generations to the young. UNICEF-Andorra had contributed to those efforts by organizing seminars for children and teachers in all of Andorra's schools, and planned to invite international personalities to Andorra to participate in that programme.

55. The international community must find a way of halting the production, use, stockpiling, sale and export of landmines, so as to prevent further suffering by the main victims, children. The children of Andorra were fortunate in that there had been peace there for over seven centuries, a peace that had favoured their education in tolerance, friendship and respect for other cultures.

56. Mr. MEKDAD (Syrian Arab Republic) said that child-related issues were a priority in his country, which had become a Party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993. The Convention had subsequently been treated as a part of national legislation and every effort had been made to implement its provisions. The needs of Syrian children were fully provided for in every sphere. Education for children between the ages of 6 and 15 was both compulsory and free. Education was free at all levels, including higher education, reflecting the Government's determination to produce children who were healthy in mind and body and fully integrated into society. Special measures were being implemented to prevent and address juvenile delinquency. National laws forbade children from taking paid employment before the age of 18 and penalized parents who failed to care adequately for their children. The fact that there had been no cases of poliomyelitis in the Syrian Arab Republic since 1993 proved that the attention paid to child health had been successful.

57. As a consequence of the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Arab Golan, tens of thousands of children had been forced to leave their homes, facing poverty, illness and deprivation. Those who had remained suffered educational, psychological and social damage as a result of such oppressive Israeli policies as altering the Arab nature of the educational curriculum and closing schools, in violation of the most basic human rights and the relevant international instruments. His Government made special provision for children orphaned by war.

58. His delegation shared the concern expressed by the Secretary-General's expert in her study on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306). The suffering of the children in the Great Lakes region of Africa was of special concern, as was that of the children of Lebanon. The shelling by Israel of the United Nations post at Qana, killing more than 100 of the civilians, scores of whom were children, who had taken refuge there, had been appalling.

59. Ms. ANNBAR (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that the study on the impact of the armed conflict on children (A/51/306), had been timely, in view of the enormous numbers of children, particularly in developing countries, who were currently the victims of armed conflict, deprived of an education or proper sustenance, or subject to sexual and other types of exploitation.

60. The expert's report provided a shameful catalogue of the abuses to which children were exposed. Events in Africa were having an extremely adverse impact on children and should be halted immediately, as should the deliberate and completely unjustified killing of Palestinian children, which the international community was observing with equanimity. Steps must be taken to halt such dreadful crimes, and the root causes of tension, conflicts and wars must be addressed through peaceful means. Children should no longer be conscripted or used for military purposes, and the relevant international instruments must be respected.

61. The report discussed the important issues of the effects of sanctions on children, raising the ethical question of whether suffering inflicted on vulnerable groups in the target country was a legitimate means of exerting pressure on political leaders. Sanctions had so far proved an inhumane and blunt instrument, and her delegation agreed with the conclusions that sanctions should be judged against the standards of universal human rights, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child, that no sanctions regime should be allowed to continue indefinitely, and that humanitarian exemptions such as medical supplies should be formulated.

62. It was not surprising that her delegation took a special interest in that issue, since her country had been subjected to a sanctions regime, imposed by the Security Council, which had frustrated all its efforts to protect the rights of the child and had put many innocent lives, particularly those of children, at risk by making essential humanitarian supplies unavailable. Deaths of newborn babies and women in childbirth had greatly increased. She therefore welcomed the recommendations in paragraphs 130 and 134 of the report that, in the interests of children, the international community should cease to impose comprehensive economic sanctions without obligatory and enforceable humanitarian exemptions and that, if sanctions failed to produce the desired result within a predetermined period, they should be replaced by other measures.

63. The section of the report dealing with landmines and unexploded ordnance was also of particular interest to her delegation, since children in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya were still being injured and killed by landmines laid there during the Second World War. The international community had a duty to urge the States which had laid those mines to shoulder their responsibilities and provide the financial and technical assistance necessary for mine clearance, and to pay adequate compensation to affected countries.

64. Mr. NARASIMHAN (India) said that children were the most important resource in any society and were the generation towards which efforts to eliminate poverty, prevent conflicts and promote economic development were directed. It was unconscionable that millions of children were being killed and maimed in armed conflicts, while others lived in conflict zones or became child soldiers or child refugees. Even more reprehensible was the deliberate targeting of children in armed conflicts and their cynical use by armed groups as combatants or as protective shields. Unaccompanied refugee minors and especially girls, who were particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and abuse, were of special concern. In post-conflict situations, children were the most frequent victims of landmines and were often disabled or disfigured for life.

65. The report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306) was an appeal from the heart to the moral conscience of humankind. Its recommendations were balanced, action-oriented and comprehensive and must be followed up by Governments, the United Nations system, civil society and all parties to armed conflicts.

66. The international community had belatedly recognized the alarming magnitude of the sale of children for purposes of child prostitution and pornography and the need for resolute national and international action to combat it. The commercial sexual exploitation of children was a fundamental violation of the rights of the child. Poverty, and the accompanying moral corrosion, played a major role on the supply side. On the demand side, consumerism and racial and gender discrimination, as well as the erosion of values and the breakdown of family structures, were significant factors. Sadly, the majority of the victims were children from developing countries, while the consumers were largely tourists and visitors from developed countries. Industrialized countries, particularly their Governments and the media, must take drastic action to eliminate the demand for child pornography, prostitution and sexual exploitation. International cooperation was necessary to act against the organized criminal networks that serviced the industry. National laws must also be reviewed and enforced, since legal deficiencies and disparities inhibited national action and international cooperation. Offenders must be prosecuted, either in the country where the offence took place or in their own country. Computer-disseminated pornography must also be tackled, as it provided a new outlet and a new market which were difficult to police.

67. The problem of child labour was a function of poverty, underdevelopment and the employment market, although in its more extreme forms, such as forced or bonded child labour and child prostitution, the element of abuse became more pronounced. Priority needed to be given to the elimination of the more extreme, exploitative and hazardous forms of child labour through comprehensive approaches covering poverty reduction, rehabilitation, alternative and remunerative employment for parents, enforcement of legislative and administrative measures, and education and vocational training. An enforcement approach that did not address the root causes of poverty would not succeed and might even aggravate the situation of the child. General development programmes with a special focus on children, and project-based action plans in sectors or areas with a high concentration of child labour, were among the strategies in use in India. Given the structural causes of poverty, international cooperation and an enabling international environment were crucial.

68. In many societies, including Indian society, the girl child had been the victim of neglect and discrimination. The Fourth World Conference on Women and the World Summit for Children gave ample guidance for Governments to undertake the necessary steps and programmes for the protection and development of the girl child. India had embarked on a major programme for enhancing the status of the girl child; that focus was also part of a more comprehensive strategy to promote the advancement of women. The approach had been rights-based, normative and developmental.

69. Mr. BARRETO (Peru) said that despite the near-universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the situation of children around the world remained critical, especially that of children in especially difficult circumstances, such as those described in the three reports before the Committee. The conclusions of the report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306) could be extended to other situations, such as that of refugee and internally displaced children. In Peru, families and especially children were suffering because of terrorist violence and the resulting internal displacement. The Government was implementing a programme to support the resettlement and development of emergency zones with a view to establishing basic conditions for the development of displaced populations and the overall development of the zones in question.

70. Peru's efforts to modernize its society and overcome its serious problems were always based on the premise that the rights and needs of children must be upheld. Peru's stability had been threatened by terrorist violence, hyperinflation and despair. The implementation of programmes to restore peace and stability and institute structural reforms had enabled Peru to resume its growth, but poverty remained an acute problem. The 1990-1995 national plan for children, which was being implemented in accordance with the goals for the mid-decade, was being coordinated with the national poverty reduction programme, which accorded priority to high-risk groups such as children under five and pregnant and nursing mothers. A national food and nutrition plan, 1996-2000, was currently being drawn up for those high-risk groups.

71. Peru had been one of the first countries to sign the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its efforts to harmonize domestic law with its obligations under the Convention were an additional demonstration of its commitment. In 1993, a child and adolescent code had entered into force, improving the prospects of child survival, development and protection; in 1995, a body responsible for formulating sectoral and institutional child and adolescent policies, plans and programmes had been established; and in 1996, the Ministry for the Advancement of Women and Human Development had been established. The national plan of action for children 1996-2000 was currently being formulated, along with short-and medium-term plans and programmes.

72. Peru attached great importance to the work of UNICEF and the international donor community, along with civil society, the Church, the media and public organizations, in addressing the needs of Peruvian children, especially the poorest among them.

73. Mrs. Espinosa (Mexico), Chairman, resumed the Chair.

74. Mr. NAKKAWITA (Sri Lanka) said that it was the duty of the current generation to pass on to children a world free of strife, conflict, hunger, disease, harassment and exploitation. His delegation therefore welcomed the level of commitment and urgency that characterized the Committee's debate. It was heartened that progress was being made in achieving the goals set by the World Summit for Children and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as shown in the Secretary-General's mid-decade review (A/51/256), and hoped that those countries that had not yet done so would ratify the Convention.

75. With its experience of a terrorist situation which had resulted in death and injury for countless women and children and the uprooting of children from their homes, Sri Lanka was well aware of the ravages of armed conflict and its impact on children. Terrorists also recruited children, referred to as "baby brigades", to augment their ranks. The international community must take action to condemn that practice and put pressure on those who resorted to it. His Government had taken several measures for the welfare of children, in collaboration with international humanitarian agencies, non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies.

76. Sri Lanka called for early implementation of the outcome of the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. Timely action against child prostitution and child pornography had become imperative in Sri Lanka; his Government had tightened existing laws against offenders and was strictly enforcing them. Public awareness programmes were being conducted with the support of non-governmental organizations. One of the reasons for the increase in child prostitution had been the rapid growth of tourism in Sri Lanka.

77. Although Sri Lanka's laws prohibited child labour, that practice was prevalent, mainly for economic reasons; while offenders had to be prosecuted, the real answer was to enhance the economic situation of families through economic development programmes. His Government was also addressing the problem of street children, which was linked to economic deprivation and lack of adequate housing.

78. In Sri Lanka, the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been embodied in a Children's Charter. A national committee to monitor the rights of the child had been established in accordance with article 40 of the Convention. An action plan for children 1992-1996 had been launched in 1991. A mid-decade review carried out by his Government in August 1996 had identified many constraints, including the ethnic conflict in north and east Sri Lanka and lack of funds. The policies and institutions concerned with the well-being of children had been developed as an integral part of the country's major social welfare programmes, which included free health services, free education and subsidized food rations. Sri Lanka had been successful in significantly reducing infant, child and maternal mortality, raising primary school enrolment to 90 per cent and providing food security for poor households. His Government appreciated the efforts made by UNICEF, other international organizations and non-governmental organizations in Sri Lanka.

79. Mr. TESSEMA (Ethiopia) said that the World Summit for Children and the Convention on the Rights of the Child were landmark developments which had helped the international community to consolidate its efforts to promote and

protect the rights of children. Young people represented more than 50 per cent of Ethiopia's population and their well-being was therefore a priority for his Government. At the national level, action-oriented policies had been adopted to enable Ethiopia to fulfil its obligations under the Convention, while at the international level, his Government continued to support universal accession to that important instrument.

80. With the end of the cold war, the threat of conflict between nations had diminished. However, millions of children throughout the world continued to suffer the consequences of civil strife. As a country which had experienced 30 years of armed conflict, Ethiopia well understood the urgent need to bring relief to those children. He welcomed, in that regard, the anti-war agenda of UNICEF which addressed many of their problems.

81. Ethiopia had been privileged to host the First Regional Consultation on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children in the Horn, Eastern, Central and Southern Africa, held in Addis Ababa in April 1995. He welcomed the statements made at the Addis Ababa Consultation and at the five other regional consultations (A/51/306/Add.1) and called upon Governments, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations to take practical action to implement the recommendations made in those statements and in the report of the Secretary-General's expert on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306).

82. Mr. FERNANDEZ PALACIOS (Cuba) said that the ambitious goals of the World Summit for Children must be translated into reality. Genuine political will was needed to break down egotism and indifference and put an end to wars, abuse and sexual exploitation.

83. Universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was an immediate priority. However, ratification in itself was insufficient. Decisive action must be taken at all levels, especially in certain parts of the world where ultra-reactionary and racist sectors were trying to impose discriminatory legislation that would deny access to basic health and education services to large numbers of children of immigrants, in flagrant violation of their fundamental human rights.

84. In all parts of the world, there were great threats to children, especially child prostitution and pornography, child labour, armed conflicts, trafficking in human organs, high child mortality rates and deaths from curable diseases. Poverty, violence and impunity made the children of the South a source of supply for the multi-million dollar sex market, which destroyed childhoods and spread AIDS. The World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children was a starting point for more comprehensive and decisive action to promote global efforts to eradicate those phenomena.

85. The proliferation of armed conflicts, which weapons exported from the industrialized countries made even more devastating, had a traumatic effect on the lives of millions of children.

86. The Commission on Human Rights must adopt both optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child as soon as possible, so as to strengthen the international framework for protecting the rights of the child.

87. Mrs. BENNANI (Morocco) said that, in all civilizations and cultures, children were considered humankind's most precious asset. Yet, even as the twenty-first century approached, the majority of the world's children, especially those in Africa, knew only poverty, illness and ignorance. The happiness and well-being of children should be a universal concern. She therefore welcomed the unprecedented efforts of the international community in recent years on behalf of the world's children. The World Summit for Children had given tremendous impetus to those efforts. Almost all countries had ratified or acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Full implementation of that important instrument would eliminate many of the ills of which the world's children were victims.

88. Her delegation commended the report of the Secretary-General's expert on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/50/306) and fully supported the proposals contained therein, in particular those concerning the appointment of a special representative to follow-up the report, the elimination of anti-personnel landmines, the eradication of the use of child soldiers and the treatment of rape as a war crime. Ultimately, the international community must seek to prevent wars and their calamitous consequences by tackling the root causes of violence. Moreover, since no war could be fought without weapons, there was a need for effective measures to control the international arms trade and prohibit the manufacture of cheap light weapons, intended for use by child soldiers.

89. Her delegation also endorsed the recommendations contained in the report on the exploitation of child labour (A/51/492). Morocco was currently amending its legislation with a view to ratifying ILO Minimum Age Convention 1973 (No. 138), while the Moroccan parliament was currently examining a bill setting the minimum age for employment at 15. Her delegation believed, however, that the problem of child labour could not be addressed through legislation alone, since economic and social factors, such as unemployment and poverty, played a decisive role.

90. Her delegation had read with interest the interim report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/51/456) and the prioritized strategies for action contained therein, in particular the proposal that every country should formulate a national strategy for preventing and combating child abuse and exploitation. The World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children had served to raise awareness in the international community of the need for more concerted action against that scourge.

91. Working in partnership with UNICEF, Morocco had made significant progress in the field of children's health, reaching its target immunization rate of 80 per cent and thereby reducing the mortality rate for children aged 15 years and under. There had been no cases of poliomyelitis since 1991. Currently, her Government's priorities were to address the threats to the survival of children in disadvantaged rural areas and to increase the proportion of girls enrolled in schools. Morocco's commitment to promoting the rights of children was reflected in its efforts to bring its national legislation into line with the various relevant international instruments. A project would shortly be launched to raise public awareness of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the

Child, while a national children's rights body had been instructed to monitor the Convention's implementation at the national level.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.